

what he did, offering only a broad absolution to many of Kelsall's fellow officials in the Conclusion: "And while we have questioned many of those purposes, we have no wish to deny the honourable intentions ... of many of the state's agents" (p. 274).

These are minor quibbles and should not detract from Kulchyski and Tester's achievement. They have taken on a vast swath of northern history, immersed themselves in the available material, and emerged with a compelling account of how relations between a modern state and a hunting society were bungled with lasting consequences. Even the creation of Nunavut has been influenced, and not entirely to the good, by the legacy of the events that occurred between 1900 and 1970. *Kiumajut* should be read by political scientists, wildlife managers, government officials, historians, and perhaps most importantly, by Inuit interested in understanding the origins of their political situation today.

#### REFERENCES

- FREEMAN, M.M.R. 1989. Graphs and gaffs: A cautionary tale in the common-property resources debate. In: Berkes, F., ed. Common property resources. London: Belhaven Press. 92–109.
- SLEZKINE, Y. 1994. Arctic mirrors: Russia and the small peoples of the North. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press. 456 p.

*Henry P. Huntington*  
23834 *The Clearing Drive*  
Eagle River, Alaska 99577, USA  
*hph@alaska.net*

EMPEROR OF THE NORTH: SIR GEORGE SIMPSON AND THE REMARKABLE STORY OF THE HUDSON'S BAY COMPANY. By JAMES RAFFAN. Toronto: HarperCollins Publishers, 2007. ISBN 9780002007832. x + 484 p., maps, b&w illus., appendices, notes, bib., index. Hardbound. Cdn\$34.95.

Sixty-five years ago, the great American historian Samuel Eliot Morison, in his fine biography of Christopher Columbus, made a perceptive comment about historians who write biographies of explorers. He wrote (1942:xv): "This book arose out of a desire to know exactly where Columbus sailed on his Four Voyages, and what sort of a seaman he was. No previous work on the Discoverer of America answers these questions in a manner to satisfy even an amateur seafarer. Most biographies of the Admiral might well be entitled 'Columbus to the Water's Edge.'" Morison, who was a sailor as well as a historian, was not satisfied with a landlubber's history, and steered his boat around the Caribbean, following Columbus' path to find out where and how the discoverer had made his first landfall.

Much the same might be said about histories of the fur trade and of northern exploration in Canada. Few writers,

certainly few academic writers, have actually walked the paths and paddled the routes of their subjects, and the histories of the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC), of which there are many, are based more on time spent in archives than time spent in canoes. It is refreshing, therefore, to find a book written by someone with extensive on-the-ground experience in northern Canada and who is also a skilled canoeist. Not that James Raffan has avoided the archives, but the fact that he has served on the boards of both the Royal Canadian Geographical Society and the Arctic Institute of North America, and that he is now the curator of the Canoe Museum in Peterborough, gives the book a perspective that is lacking in many accounts of the company.

Sir George Simpson (1786–1860) is undoubtedly the best-known figure in the history of the Hudson's Bay Company, and because his career coincided with the company's golden age, a biography of Simpson will naturally include a history of the company that played such an important role in the history of northern and western Canada. One problem with this biography of Simpson is that the man does not come across as a particularly human character, not even in his personal relationships—his marriage and his substantial brood of illegitimate children. He was first and foremost a businessman, and a ruthless one, and he seems to have been all business, both in his public and in his private life, at least in that part of his life that appears in his correspondence. It is just as well, then, that Raffan has expanded the book to include the Company as a whole, and the history of the Canadian northwest.

This book is clearly intended to be popular history, to reach a wider market than histories issued by academic presses. This is made evident on the dust cover, which calls the book "an epic tale." Academics publishing for promotion wouldn't be caught dead writing epic tales, and the motive is made even clearer by an endorsement on the back from Farley Mowat, saying that "with this book, James Raffan joins the ranks of Pierre Berton and Peter C. Newman." To any serious academic writing about the Hudson's Bay Company, favourable comparison to Newman would be extremely unwelcome.

Thus it seems fair to judge this book as a popular rather than an academic work of history, despite its footnotes and bibliography. As such, it achieves a certain amount of success. Raffan does not invent conversations, or at least not many of them, but he does indulge in speculation to an extent that would put a hard frost on a thesis student's chances of success. For instance, when Simpson first arrives in America as an agent of the HBC, Raffan says "It is not known exactly on whom Simpson called during his several days in New York City, but...Simpson may well have called on...J.J. Astor...Col. Thomas Handasyd Perkins...Mr. Robert Lenox..." (p. 81–82). There's really nothing wrong with such a literary device, since it permits Raffan to tell us interesting facts about the commercial history of the North American fur trade without being too didactic about it.

The book's greatest strength, however, is in the author's familiarity with and control over his material. When he

places Simpson in a particular place, one has the feeling that Raffan has been there too, and knows it well, just as S.E. Morison had been to Watling Island, Columbus' landing place, and knew it just as well as Columbus had. This gives an invaluable immediacy to the book.

The book has two flaws, however. First, it's too long. Raffan has mined the Hudson's Bay archives extensively, but the ore extracted has been insufficiently refined. The result is that the latter part of the book quotes and paraphrases more material from Simpson's papers and journals than most people will want to read. Secondly, some of his prose is pretty turgid. It's not unfair to expect an author to write sentences that can be understood at first reading, but unfortunately this book contains many that fail that test. As examples, here are two taken at random, in which parenthetical phrases impede immediate understanding: "Maria, who turned eighteen (and who was only three years younger than Frances, her would-be stepmother) in 1833, had been thriving in and around the Beauy Firth and was to be married to a young Inverness solicitor called Donald Mactavish. Although he was most certainly invited, for reasons of propriety or health Simpson appears not to have attended the wedding on October 25, but he did quietly pay Mactavish a dowry of £500 (Simpson's salary that year, not including expense allowances, was £1,800) to allow the newlyweds to emigrate to Canada and purchase property in Haldimand Township in Upper Canada" (p. 289–290). Pierre Berton never wrote sentences like these.

There's quite a lot of this sort of thing, and one wishes that the book had had a stricter editor, for it detracts from the book's popular appeal. As a record of an important figure and his times, however, it makes a valuable contribution.

#### REFERENCE

MORISON, S.E. 1942. *Admiral of the ocean sea: A life of Christopher Columbus*. Boston: Little, Brown.

*William R. Morrison*  
*University of Northern British Columbia*  
*3333 University Way*  
*Prince George, British Columbia V2N 4Z9, Canada*  
*Morrison@unbc.ca*

ALASKA TREES AND SHRUBS. By LESLIE A. VIERECK and ELBERT L. LITTLE, Jr. Fairbanks: University of Alaska Press, 2007. 2nd ed. ISBN 1-889963-86-0. x + 359 p., maps, b&w illus., colour plates. glossary, bib., index. Softbound. US\$24.95.

This second edition of *Alaska Trees and Shrubs* is an update of the original 1972 U.S. Forest Service Agriculture Handbook No. 410. This popular handbook was out of print and unavailable for several years until 1986, when the University of Alaska Press republished it in its original 1972 format.

In this second edition, Dr. David F. Murray, professor of botany and curator emeritus, University of Alaska Fairbanks, reviewed and updated plant names and made other significant contributions. Dr. George Argus, curator emeritus, Canadian Museum of Nature, Ottawa, provided important information on the Alaska willows.

There are notable changes in this second edition, but the general format and content of the first edition are retained. The front cover of the first edition was a drawing of an interior spruce-birch forest by late Fairbanks artist William D. Berry. The front cover of this second edition consists of nine colour photographs and three line drawings. I had fun trying to identify the three species depicted in the line drawings, which weren't identified in the "Cover images" on the copyright page.

This new edition includes 16 pages of excellent colour photographs of selected Alaska trees and shrubs and important landscapes and major vegetation types. The keys have been changed to couplet format, which makes them easier to use, and English measurements have been changed to metric units. A glossary and appendices that include non-native and transplanted trees and shrubs have been added. The bibliography and index of common and scientific names are comprehensive and useful.

Advances in techniques and procedures, better communications and collaboration, and new publications in plant taxonomy have resulted in the reclassification of several species of Alaska shrubs since the first edition. Major plant inventories were conducted in the new parks and refuges established in Alaska after the passage of the Alaska National Interests Land Conservation Act (ANILCA) in 1980. These inventories resulted in significant changes in the known distributions of some Alaska trees and shrubs, which are reflected in changes in boundaries in the range maps. The map on pages 36–37 shows the major national parks, monuments, preserves, forests, wildlife refuges, and major cities, towns, roads, and rivers in the state. A comparison of this map with individual species range maps shows the distributions of trees and shrubs and their overlap with these features. Unfortunately, the binding of the book obscures some labels in the middle of the map, e.g., near Bettles, Denali, and Kenai. I had to pry open my copy to find the label number (24) for Kenai National Wildlife Refuge. This map would have been better as a foldout, like the map of vegetation types on the following pages.

Distribution maps in the species accounts are presented as "generalized shaded areas around the specimen locations using a buffer radius of approximately fifty kilometers" (p. 3). These maps are also viewable online via web links to the very well designed and easy-to-use website of the University of Alaska Fairbanks (<http://137.229.80.38/website/aktrees/viewer.htm>) and the U.S. Forest Service's Bonanza Creek Long-Term Ecological Research Program (<http://www.lter.uaf.edu>).

There is an interesting section entitled "Vegetation of Alaska," which reminds us of the extremes in climate and physical geography that influence vegetation in Alaska.